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SUBJECT: JUMBLATT FRETS THAT SYRIA IS PAINTING HIM AS PKK  
SUPPORTER

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Over a 3/16 lunch otherwise dominated by discussion of Lebanon's domestic developments, Druse leader Walid Jumblatt told the Ambassador that he was deeply worried that Syria was implicating him with PKK terrorism. Former Syrian VP Abdulhalim Khaddam, who met with Jumblatt earlier that week in Paris, warned Jumblatt that the Syrians were busily passing fabricated information to the Turks that Jumblatt serves as a channel for arms and money to the PKK. Describing the charges as "ridiculous," Jumblatt complained that he has a hard enough time assembling funds for the patronage he is expected to bestow upon Lebanon's Druse community.

¶2. (S) Asked by the Ambassador on what basis the Syrians could assemble a case that would appear to the Turks to be even remotely credible, Jumblatt said that he assumed the Syrians were simply playing on deep-seated Turkish worries about the PKK. Since Jumblatt's family is reportedly Kurdish in origin before coming to Lebanon via a few centuries spent in Aleppo 400 years ago, Syria probably argues that Jumblatt retains contacts and sympathy for the Kurds. Moreover, Jumblatt has met with Syrian Kurds who, like Jumblatt, oppose Bashar al-Asad's Damascus regime. That could very well be sufficient to convince the Turks that he is a problem, Jumblatt said.

¶3. (S) Jumblatt said that, when he returned from Paris, he immediately tried to reach the Turkish Ambassador to Lebanon to invite him to lunch; the Turkish Embassy has yet to return his phone call, which worries him. Jumblatt said that he does not see the PKK charges as increasing his already high level of security concerns, but the Syrian propaganda could very well affect Turkey's political posture toward the Lebanese. If the Syrians convince the Turks that the March 14 leadership is supportive of the PKK, then Turkey will be even more inclined to side with Syria's allies in Lebanon. Jumblatt described Ankara's Lebanon policy as "suspicious" already.

¶4. (S) Separately on 3/16, the Ambassador met with Mohamed Chatah, senior advisor to Prime Minister Siniora, who serves as Siniora's private channel to Ankara. The Ambassador relayed Jumblatt's concerns to Chatah, asking whether Chatah thought Jumblatt was simply displaying an unusual level of paranoia. Shaking his head, Chatah said that he has been asked recently by Turkish officials whether the Syrian accusations that Jumblatt supports the PKK with arms and money could possibly be true. The Syrians are definitely passing such a message, Chatah said, although he was not

convinced that the Turks were buying it. Chatah said that, based on all information and intelligence he has seen, the Syrian charges linking Jumblatt with the PKK are baseless.

15. (S) Comment: Jumblatt has been accused of many things by the Syrians. Recently, for example, the Iranian-funded pro-Syrian newspaper al-Akhbar accused Jumblatt and his close advisor Marwan Hamadeh of having met with Israeli Mossad agents at a meeting hosted at the U.S. Ambassador's Residence. Despite the clear security implications of such accusations, Jumblatt in general shrugs off such propaganda.

So we find his deep concern about the PKK charges to be curious. We know of no reasons to find the supposed Syrian allegations to be credible.

FELTMAN